

INTRODUCTION TO FRENCH POLITICS

Professor: **Thomas VITIELLO**
Session: **July 2023**
Language of instruction: **English**
Number of hours of class: **24h**



Objective of the Course

The main objective of the course is to enable students who are unfamiliar with French politics to understand the major political issues in the country and the peculiar dynamics of the last presidential campaigns, in order to be able to participate in political discussions during their stay in France. Students will gain the intellectual tools necessary to decipher the history of French politics in the last fifty years, the voting behaviour of French voters, as well as the news coverage of French politics.



Summary

This course is dedicated to the presentation, discussion, and analysis of the main stakes of French political life, with a particular focus on presidential elections. The focus of the seminar will be on developing an understanding of the main events, actors, processes and ideas that have shaped and influenced contemporary France since the birth of the current Fifth Republic in 1958. The course will first identify the main actors within French politics by the study of its institutions, its culture, its ideological debates, and its historical roots (session 1 to 7). The course will then undertake the presentation and analysis of recent electoral trends and the evolution of political discourse. This task will be based on the study of key presidential elections (1981, 2002, 2007, 2012, 2017, and 2022) that will shed light on the causes and consequences of the transformation of the French party system and on current electoral trends (session 8 to 12). The following questions, among others, will be addressed throughout the course: What are the causes behind the spectacular rise of Emmanuel Macron, his victory in 2017 and his re-election in 2022? Have we entered a new political world? How might we understand the strength of the National Front in French politics?



Organization of the course

1 – Introduction: The legacy of Gaullism and the birth of the Fifth Republic

- Power distribution in the French political system
- How do institutions work in France?
- What are the powers of the President? The Prime Minister? Parliament?

2 – State, Republic, Nation in France

- State and 'Statism'
- The Republic
- National identity debates (1981-2017)

3 – Party politics (1) The Left

- Birth and history of the Left in France
- Contemporary evolution, strategy and transformations
- Is Macronism a Left-wing movement?

4 – Party politics (2) The Right

- Birth and history of the Right in France
- Contemporary evolution, strategy and transformations
- Is Macronism a Right-wing movement?

5 – Party politics (3) Radical political forces and protest groups: The National Front

- Birth and history of the extreme-Right in France
- Contemporary evolution, strategy and transformations

6 – French electoral behaviour and political communication

- Voting patterns
- How to analyse political gaps and polarisation of French politics?
- What role the media play in French electoral campaigns?

7 – Presidential elections in 2002: the candidates' nightmare

- Why did Jean-Marie Le Pen reach the 2nd round of the election?
- Did the 21st April reshuffle the cards of party politics?
- How did the Left get over the elimination of its candidate?

8 – From 2007 to 2012: a political renewal?

- A real shift in candidates?
- What were the topics around which these elections revolved?

9 – A disruptive vote? What happened during the 2017 and 2022 Presidential elections?

- How to explain the emergence of Emmanuel Macron
- A political world torn into pieces?
- Old politics? New politics?



Professor's Biography



Dr..Thomas Vitiello (PhD Sciences Po, MSc UvA, BA IEPG) teaches political sciences courses (French politics, understanding and measuring public opinion, the personalization of politics...) at Sciences Po and works as a survey manager in the public sector. His research focuses on online Voting Advice Applications (VAAs) and the study of electoral behaviour. He was the leading researcher in the development at the CEVIPOF (Centre of Political Research of Sciences Po) of the French VAA of “La Boussole présidentielle” for the 2017 and 2022 French presidential elections. His research has been published in *Revue Française de Science Politique*, *Revue Internationale de Politique Comparée*, *Party Politics*, and the *International Journal of Electronic Governance*. His most recent co-authored publication is « *La République En Marche: Anatomie d'un mouvement* », a sociological study on LaREM's members.